Stream Advocate

Riverways/Adopt-A-Stream Program Newsletter *Fall 2000*

FOLLOW UP SURVEYS: BEYOND THE SHORELINE SURVEY

Did you find problems on your river that need further research? Adopt-A-Stream Program staff can help your group conduct follow-up surveys on several topics such as wetlands, bridge surveys, storm drains, or buffers and riparian areas (our newest survey). Taking a look at the river from a different angle will provide new insights into problems and potential solutions.

Partnering with town boards

Before beginning a new survey or any project, your Stream Team should work with town boards to determine how the project could complement town planning. As projects come up for review, the background information from a Shoreline Survey or a follow up survey can be an important part of the process. The town could use your information when writing its master plan or open space plan. The Department of Public Works might be looking at new bridge construction or monitoring storm water discharges, and the more information boards have at their disposal when making decisions, the more informed their decisions will be. Talk to your Conservation Commission, DPW and town planner regularly. What information would be most useful to protect rivers and their resources?

What surveys are available and how do I get them?

The Adopt-A-Stream Program works in partnership with other organizations to develop surveys. You can get data sheets by contacting the Adopt-a-Stream Program or printing off the web site. Formal training associated with the data sheets may not be necessary, but Adopt-A-Stream staff will work with groups to organize surveys, explain data sheets, compile data and plan ways to use the data for resource protection.

In addition to doing a focused follow up survey, described as follows, you can also do a second Shoreline Survey. It is often helpful to do a Shoreline Survey at different times of year. Understanding the seasonal fluctuations of your stream will alert you to unnatural changes such as sudden flow changes, riparian area cutting or spills. Regular surveying provides an opportunity to get back out on the river, see how things have changed and see new areas of the stream.

Bridges: Bridges over streams and rivers may provide areas for public access, such as fishing or areas for launching canoes. They may also serve as navigation hazards for recreation. Bridges have an effect on the river channel itself by changing flow patterns and creating scour or trapping debris. Surveys of bridges can help your group determine existing and possible access points to the river or stream or can point out navigation hazards for canoeists and areas for cleanups of trapped debris. Bridges are also areas where road runoff and sediments can harm the stream. Surveys can bring to attention areas needing remediation or reduction of storm water runoff.

Wetlands: Wetland surveys can help determine where degraded wetlands exist, help you plan remediation for the particular wetlands, or illustrate the need for greater public education about the importance of these areas. Wetlands are often areas where invasive species take hold, trash and debris collect and where Stream Teams can benefit the stream by providing greater oversight.

Storm Drains: As the EPA begins to focus on its new Phase II storm water regulations, many Massachusetts cities and towns will be faced with satisfying generic NPDES (National Pollution Discharge Elimination Systems—part of the Clean Water Act) permits for their storm water discharges. Many of these cities and towns do not have exact knowledge of their stormwater systems to fulfill the requirements of the generic NPDES permit. Accurate mapping of storm drains is rare, due in part to older systems in many communities. These storm water systems carry runoff, which often keeps streams from meeting water quality standards. Helping to map your town or city stormdrains by pinpointing outflow points and looking at catchbasins can help municipalities get a handle on their stormdrain system. The Adopt-A-Stream Program is looking for groups interested in pilot projects to map storm drains. Let staff know if you are interested in being a part of such a project.

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STAFF CHANGES

Following Maria Van Dusen's retirement as director of the Riverways Programs, Joan Kimball, formerly Adopt-A-Stream Coordinator, has been appointed as the new Riverways Programs Director (See Joan's letter inside). In Joan's place Rachel Calabro is serving as Acting Coordinator of the Adopt-a-Stream Program. Maria started as the first Adopt-A-Stream Coordinator with the Riverways Programs 13 years ago and has worked statewide to foster advocates for our rivers. Through hours of night meetings, canoe trips, river cleanups and more, Maria's consistent leadership and hard work has lead to expanded watershed stewardship at all levels. We wish Maria good luck and thank her for the incredible insight and energy she has contributed throughout her continued years of dedication to the rivers of Massachusetts.

NEW DATA SHEETS

The Shoreline Survey data sheets have been expanded to include a more extensive focus on habitat and wildlife issues. Using suggestions from the Natural Resource Conservation Service, these new questions better address efforts toward stream protection. Copies of the data sheets are available through our office, or can be print them directly off the webpage: www.state.ma.us/dfwele/river/rivaas_pubs.htm.

(Follow up Surveys Continued)

Riparian Areas: The Riparian Area Survey is designed to help your Stream Team prioritize areas for remediation of stream banks and buffers. The survey allows you to describe the conditions of your riparian areas and determine whether they provide buffering necessary for reducing polluted runoff or creating habitat and stabilizing banks. Stream Teams can then work to solve problems, for example, they can work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service or local groups to plant vegetation to provide buffers, stop erosion and increase the habitat value of the stream.

Pipe Surveys on the Charles and the Alewife: Examples of surveys in action

Kayaking on the lower Charles River, Cambridge resident Roger Frymire consistently noticed sewage smells. After taking part in a Shoreline Survey on the lower Charles River, Roger realized a more extensive pipe survey was necessary to fill in gaps. Roger attracted more attention to the situation by conducting a pipe survey in the lower Charles River. Although his work initially received ittle attention from local DPW's and Public Health officials, consistent reporting and pressure has moved agencies to take notice.

Even though much attention is already focused on the Charles River watershed, including his own initial pipe survey, Roger found more information was still needed specifically on the pipes. After doing a second survey and reporting on about thirty suspected pollution sources, Roger found at least a few have been fixed. His reports have garnered the attention of regulators, one of whom asked him for a ranking of the "Smellcheck" points. Since then, several Conservation Commissions and Public Health officials have collaborated to apply for an EMPACT (Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking) grant to better monitor the pollution sources and provide more timely and accurate public notice about environmental health issues.

Roger's pipe survey on Alewife Brook in the Mystic River Watershed once again highlighted the continuing storm drain problems on the small brook and helped raise the profile of the watershed association.

Sewage and poor water quality is not news in many communities, but a pipe survey lends weight to citizen concerns and often alerts regulators and town boards to specific problems. Other surveys can have a similar effect. Surveys also strengthen grant applications or make it obvious where more money might be needed.

Survey Follow up

What will happen to the information, and how should it be written to have the most impact? Survey reports do not need to be formal, but should be well organized, so results are clear when presented to interested boards and others. Follow the basic format of the Adopt-A-Stream Shoreline Survey Reports. Make sure that the report highlights the purpose of the survey, important findings and your recommendations for action. A map plotting the area and major concerns is essential because it locates the problems and clarify specifics. The Adopt-A-Stream staff can provide a base map for you.~

Dear Stream Teams and watershed associations,

I am writing to tell you that I have accepted the position of the Director of the Riverways Program following Maria Van Dusen's retirement.

It has been a terrific ten years working with Stream Teams and the watershed associations. I have felt privileged to work with you as you involve town officials, abutters, residents and civic groups to form Stream Teams and conduct Shoreline Surveys. I will never forget the action planning meetings where your frank and thoughtful discussions culminated in creative suggestions for solving problems and protecting resources.

Your work has been important locally – you have shared stream data with town officials, brought in money to solve problems with grants, increased monitoring, provided clean ups, held forums and festivals, met with legislators, teamed up with water suppliers to promote careful use of water, made trails, testified at hearings and protected land. Many of you have worked with local Conservation Commissions, Selectmen and Boards of Health to solve problems locally; others of you have reported serious findings to DEP and found resolution.

On a statewide basis, your Shoreline Survey Reports have aided DEP in their assessments in several watersheds, allowing them to pinpoint sources of problems and to include information in the aesthetic narrative required in the water quality reports. As DEP continues to write assessments for other watersheds, they will use your reports to help protect and restore the rivers of the Commonwealth. Many of you have presented your reports and findings to the EOEA Watershed Teams. Some watershed teams have included your findings in their Five Year Action Plans; others will include them in their annual workplans—thus further ensuring solutions to problems and protection of resources. From the beginning, Stream Teams have been seen as the heart of the Watershed Initiative. Stream Teams bring people together to connect to rivers and to each other.

There is still lots more work to be done. Our rivers need constituencies to speak on their behalf. We must continue to ask "what do rivers need to be healthy?" and to look at the effects of proposals and remedies on the river and its resources.

Issues that will be coming to the forefront include adequate flow for our rivers (seeing water conservation as a way to work with water suppliers), water quality (looking at Phase II of Stormwater Regulations as an opportunity to work with town boards), and habitat (determining what exists and how to protect it.)

As Acting Adopt-A-Stream Coordinator, Rachel Calabro brings her skills as Riverways Stream Team Technical Assistant, as facilitator, as our web master and Riverways Newsletter Editor, as well as her professional understanding of geological processes. Rachel has already added a stronger emphasis on habitat in our data sheets, and will focus on implementation to the Stream Teams. Together she and Amy Singler, Stream Team Organizer, will be starting new stream teams and supporting current ones. I look forward to seeing you out on the rivers across the state and learning about your good work. Thanks and congratulations!

--Joan

ADOPT-A-STREAM WEB-PAGE UPDATES

www.state.ma.us/dfwele/river/rivaas_toc.htm

Our webpage has recently been updated and revised to include more resources, and make it easier to use. You can now print portions of the Adopt-a-Stream Leader's Manual or the updated datasheets. Thinking about doing a followup survey? Data sheets are available online. (We can still mail material if you prefer.) We are also adding Stream Teams' ongoing work throughout the year. If your Stream Team has new accomplishments, let us know and we can add them to your page so others can read and learn what might work in their watershed. Another resource is the Frequently Asked Questions section.

Sample Frequently Asked Questions.

Ever wonder what to do about a snag caught in a river? How to find public access points? Who to call about a fishkill? Often we find people asking similar questions, so we have developed a list of FAQ's as a resource. A full listing is on our web-site Resources *section. You can find out things such as:*

What river features should we protect in order to protect habitat?

Rivers and their floodplains are critical habitat for both terrestrial and aquatic communities, and represent a link between the upland and river habitats. Riparian zones serve as corridors for migration and daily movement of animals and provide shelter and access to the water. The physical and biological diversity of these areas is maintained largely by the river's dynamic nature and through disturbances such as floods, drought, ice-scour, snags and channel migration. A healthy floodplain helps to absorb floodwaters, maintain flows during a drought, and buffer the river from nutrients, sediments and pollution. You should protect as many features of these areas as needed to allow for change to take place (for example, maintain a wide enough floodplain to allow for channel migration). Specifically, you should work to protect:

Natural Channel bottom: *Provide habitat for fish and insects to lay their eggs and spend a large portion of the lifecycle.*

Vegetated banks: *Provide shelter and a food source, and reduce water temperature.*

Snags: *Provide shelter, nutrients, an area for basking and a connection to the water.*

Wetlands: *Provide habitat, water storage, and act as buffers to the river and so much more.* **~**

WE HAVE MOVED!

The Department of Fisheries, Wildlife & Environmental Law Enforcement, along with many of the departments under the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs have moved.

Adopt-A-Stream Program
251 Causeway Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02114.

Visit our library full of resources, including: reports, manuals and videos. The new space is easily accessible, located just a block from North Station. Please call in advance so we can be sure someone will be here to assist you. Phone numbers will remain the same.

Rachel Calabro, Acting Adopt-A-Stream Coordinator 626-1549
Amy Singler, Stream Team Organizer 626-1548

RESOURCES

Urban News

If you are interested in urban issues, you may request a copy of *Urban News*- our Urban Rivers Programs newsletter.

Grants

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs is currently accepting applications for two different grants.

Volunteer Monitoring Grants for new and existing monitoring. Applications are now being accepted through January 25, 2001. Contact John Clarkeson at john.clarkeson@state.ma.us.

Outdoor Classroom Grants to promote watershed and environmental education in schools are being accepted on a rolling basis through January 31, 2001. Contact Melissa Griffiths at 617-626-1181.

More information on both grants, including applications, selection criteria, process and goals is available at www.comm-pass.com. **~**

BOARDS OF HEALTH MAY NOW ISSUE EMERGENCY PERMITS FOR BEAVER PROBLEMS

Much attention has been devoted to beavers in the past several years as their population has grown, their habitat has been reduced by development, and regulations have shifted. Chapter 139 of the Acts of 2000 authorizes Municipal Boards of Health to issue emergency permits for alleviating threats to human health and safety from the activities of beaver or muskrats. Permits can be issued for breaching of dams and using water-flow devices under the conditions of the local Conservation Commission. Trapping and relocating the animals can also be permitted following the rules set by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Definitions of a threat to health and human safety outlined in the act include flooding of wells, well fields, septic systems, pumping stations, roads, driveways, railroads, runways or public utilities. Also included are problems associated with hazardous waste sites or incineration and recycling plants or flooding of public structures such as fire stations and hospitals. In terms of private property, problems with flooding of buildings or agricultural land where there is substantial loss of production or stability of the land are taken into consideration. Check with your local Boards of Health to see how the permitting process will work in your town or city.

The expansion of the beaver population in Massachusetts has been a particularly difficult issue to balance for homeowners, wildlife enthusiasts and watershed associations alike, because while beavers create excellent wildlife habitat they also can increase flooding . By blocking streams and flows, beavers create wetlands, which are important habitat for many plant and animal species. In fact, estimates by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service are that up to 43% of threatened and endangered species rely directly or indirectly on wetlands for their survival. This makes wetlands excellent for wildlife viewing, in addition to being important for drought protection and improving water quality by filtering runoff.

Alternatives to trapping beaver include "beaver deceivers", which are culverts strategically placed to maintain flow, and fences and "beaver bafflers" which protect existing culverts from being blocked. Volunteer groups in Massachusetts, such as the Pioneer Valley Wetland Volunteers, have worked to install low cost solutions. For more information on beavers and alternatives solutions contact the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, 508-792-7270. **~**

GET OUT ON THE WATER

Public Access to the Waters of Massachusetts

The new edition of the Public Access Board guide to boat access facitilies is now available, includes maps for most popular sites. Copies are $5, additional $3 for shipping. Contact the Public Access board at 617-727-1843.

NEW STREAM TEAMS ACROSS THE STATE

Streams teams are continuing to do excellent work all around Massachusetts. Joining the ranks are groups on the:

Westfield River (Windsor, Savoy and Washington);
Smallpox Brook (Salisbury);
First Herring Brook (Scituate);
Weweantic River (Wareham);
Otter River and Tully River, Millers River Watershed.

Read Stream Teams updates in the Riverways Newsletter for more details on Stream Teams across Massachusetts.

The **Adopt-A-Stream Program** works to support and encourage local stream teams and communities in efforts to protect and restore the ecological integrity of the Commonweath's watersheds; rivers streams and adjacent lands.

For more information or to receive our newsletter, please contact:

Rachel Calabro, Acting Coordinator
Adopt-A-Stream Program
251 Causeway Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02114
(617) 626-1549
Email: Rachel.Calabro@state.ma.us

Also check out our web-site:
http://www.state.ma.us/dfwele/river/rivaas_toc.htm

Riverways Programs, Joan Kimball, Director
Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Environmental Law Enforcement, David M. Peters, Commissioner
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs,
Bob Durand, Secretary

Adopt-A-Stream Program
Dept. Fisheries, Wildlife & Environmental Law Enforcement
251 Causeway Street, 4th Floor
Boston, MA 02114